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RESPONSIBILITY OF CHRISTIANS FOR THE CUSTOM OF WAR IN CHRISTENDOM.

TO THE FRIENDS OF MISSIONS.

In a former number we glanced at the heathen state of the army. A large class of men in the very heart of Christendom, with whom the gospel is perverted by an order of subaltern chaplains within, and from whom it is excluded by an environ of bristling bayonets without. This large field, comprising an aggregate of at least three millions of souls in Christian Europe alone, as standing armies in time of peace, is not open to true missionary operation, nor can be from the very nature of the case. The gospel can have no fellowship with the war-system, their ultimate designs being in direct contrast. And yet the great Head of the church has enjoined on his followers, on us, to preach the gospel to every creature. It was with this view of the subject we raised the question, Is it true, that when the Redeemer "ascended on high, led captivity captive and received gifts for men," He furnished no antidote against the evil of international war?

To this inquiry we now answer: Christ in the gospel *has* furnished an ample remedy for this enormous evil: the war system or the gospel is a fiction, and its promises false. Its very title is, "The gospel of peace." Christ was predicted as the Prince of Peace. Peace swelled the song of the angelic choir that announced his advent. When He broached his mission, in his sermon on the mount, peace was made prominent among his aphorisms and benedictions. And forgiveness as the true ground of peace, He made the test spirit of discipleship. In short, He bequeathed peace as his last legacy to his followers, making it their distinctive, characteristic Badge. And the prophetic promise still is sure: "The law shall go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem: He shall judge among the nations, and rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Then, and not till then, may the gospel be preached to every creature.

But, not to dwell on a point so extensively conceded by Christians, the great practical question is: How shall the Christian church so apply the gospel as to produce this its legitimate effect? To this question our simple answer is: Withdraw all religious sanction from war. Simple as this answer may appear, it is confidently believed this would be amply adequate to the end. War, as a great disposer of human lives, assumes too much of the divine prerogative to keep itself in countenance without the aid of religious sanction. The history of the world abundantly attests this fact. Witness the wars of the ancient pagans; their tutelary duties made to take a prominent part in their contests. So much so was it at the time of the exodus of Israel, that God saw fit to establish the fact of his own Omnipotency, and the utter futility of the heathen dependencies, by having recourse to war.

Nor can it be shown that the heart of depraved man has in any age been hard enough to brook the guilt of homicide, without the shield of religious sanction. Even Cain, when protected from violence by a mark which made him a spectacle of this crime, exclaimed, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." Remove religious support from the system of war, and leave the practice to stand on its own naked merits, and it would sink of its own weight. Yes; let the Christian church be redeemed from the deadly dogma of war, and the work is done. The world is too far civilized to support it long on the credit of paganism.

But the inquiry will arise : If war be unchristian, how came Christianity first to lend its aid and sanction to a practice so barbarous and pagan ? We answer, not by compulsion of its enemies, but by the policy of its faithless friends. For about three centuries after the ascension of Christ, the church discarded war. Its members would sooner suffer martyrdom than engage in battle. To say I am a Christian, was equivalent to saying I cannot fight. It was not until Christianity was taken into favor with the state, and made the religion of the Roman Empire, its ministers made officers of the state, and its religious worship brought into connection with the holidays and festivals of a pagan people, that the military profession found place in the church. It was the concomitant, if not the consequence, of a general degeneracy so deplorable, that few vestiges of primitive piety were to be found in the laity. Thus succeeded the dark ages, when the church became a mere police for the state, and the state in return a burner of heretics for the church.

But we live in a better age, and act on different principles. The true province of civil government is now too well understood to admit the idea that the cause of justice can require nations occasionally to abandon civil for military law, and equity for brute force. The first and best statesmen of our age denounce such appeals. Among the relics of the venerable John Quincy Adams, we find the following, written in his seat in the Representatives' Hall, at Washington, April 10, 1844 : * * * "We believe that universal and permanent peace belongs to the law of nature and of nature's God : to the genius and spirit of Christianity ; to the liberty, justice and prosperity of nations ; indispensable to the true interests of all mankind, and claiming the prayers and efforts of all the human race." With this in hand, he passed into the lobby, adding in conversation with the circle, "War is the enemy of civil liberty and prosperity. The cause of peace is the cause of truth, justice and humanity." On showing the above, it received the cordial approbation of scores of the most venerable senators, heads of department, officers of colleges, D. D.'s, &c.

Thus clear is it that the most venerable and experienced statesmen are ready to abolish the system of war, if such a course could comport with popular sentiment. But the officer of state is a dependent man, and must yield to the popular will, too often to the popular folly and falsity, or leave his place to another more obsequious. Hence the rush for military fame by young aspirants to office, whenever war offers the opportunity, for that military fame which forms the chief ground of availability for a public candidate. Too well he knows that, in view of the multitude, military honors are the great desideratum. Too well he knows that this, as the sole recommendation, is with the great body even of Christians no insuperable objection to lending their support. By thus bestowing the highest honors as a reward for military achievements, the Christian public, the church, is undoubtedly doing more for the support of the war-system than all it can undo without the abandonment of that practice. But, were the doctrines of peace, as they stand opposed to international war, made an integral part of the Protestant faith, and as such adhered as steadfastly to, as a Catholic adheres to his tenets, an end might soon be put to this military availability, and all its lamentable consequences.

Another way in which leading religious men give countenance and support to the war-system is, by giving currency and approbation to certain erroneous interpretations of Scripture, derived from olden times. Let us notice one passage, Romans 13: 5, "Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath but also for conscience' sake." This passage is often made to give to civil government, as such, power to bind the consciences of men, consequently to lay men under moral and religious obligations to take up arms in war, or, at least, exonerate them from guilt in so doing. But is

such the true intent of the passage? The Roman church, to whom the apostle was writing, was under a government whose laws were in the main just and good; yet it was in its organization blended with paganism. On this account, many of the church had scruples about allegiance, fearing it would involve them in the sin of idolatry. To relieve them from such scruples, the apostle begins the subject, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; *for there is no power but of God,*" and then proceeds to amplify this thought, thus leaving no room for Jupiter. And having thus allayed their scruples, to excite to cordial obedience, he adduces these facts that the government required of them to do that only which was good, and threatened with wrath (punishment) that only which was evil. Wherefore, he then adds, "Ye must needs be subject not only for wrath but also for conscience' sake." By giving a just and common sense interpretation to this and similar passages of Scripture, which are often made to authorize civil power to compete with the authority of God, in giving sanction to deeds of blood, one of its chief and most venerable props would be removed from the war-system.

But the supports we have named, if the most prominent are not the most numerous supports unobserved, fill our system of education from the nursery of the infant to our college halls; and it is well if our theological seminaries are free from their inculcation. The child, in his pious mother's lap, learns to answer a question like this, "Who was the strongest man?" or this, "Who killed Goliath?" Here inquiries are excited in the mind of the child which call out from the parent explanations founded indeed on Scripture history, but so tinged with the glosses of the war-delusion, as to give license, in the child's mind, to valiant deeds of blood. As an allurements to the Sabbath school a fourth of July excursion is offered the children, perhaps to some fort, battle-ground, or relic of the Revolution. In such case the scenes and recital of historic facts, are far more likely to cherish in their minds a spirit of war than any just sense of civil liberty. Yet the impressions made upon their susceptible minds, they are sure to cherish as from pious parents and Sabbath school teachers. In like manner, if we look at our course of education from the district schools up to the college halls, we shall find our books for reading and declamation, as well as the classes, filled with the embellishments of war. Thus in ways too numerous to mention here, we may see the seeds of war planted, and their young nourished even under the fostering hand of piety.

May we not, then, appeal to friends of missions, and to all who are desirous of seeing the gospel in its purity and efficiency proclaimed to every class, to ferret out this insidious error in all its working places, and to rebuke it in all its bold demands. Especially would we appeal to ministers of the gospel. You are set upon the walls of Zion as watchmen, and receive your commission from a higher source than the statesman. Like that of Ezekiel, your charge runs thus, "Receive the word at my mouth, and warn the people from Me." Indulge not the thought that your means are inadequate to the desired end. Are they less efficient than those of a pagan or papal priesthood? For what purpose are you made leaders in the church of God, "the ground and pillar of the truth;" destined to be the light of the world, and the salt of the earth? For what purpose do the people of all ranks listen to your instruction one day in seven? For what purpose is it ordained that you should preside in our literary institutions, and that under your moulding hand should pass the incipient statesman and civilian? And for what purpose is "given you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries have not been, and shall not be, able to gainsay or resist?" With these advantages, is it not your imperative duty to withdraw yourselves and all within your influence from the support of war?